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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: POSITIVE INITIAL FRENCH RESPONSE TO DEMARCHE ON
ISOLATING SYRIA AT UNGA

REF: STATE 159137

Classified By: Acting Political Minister-Counselor Bruce Turner, reason
s 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (S) Poloff discussed reftel points on isolating Syria at UNGA with MFA desk officer for Syria/Lebanon Remy Bouallegue and MFA desk officer for UN/Middle East Affairs Salina Grenet on August 31. Bouallegue reiterated that the GoF would not receive Syrian officials at UNGA and was maintaining its non-contact policy with senior Syrian officials. He confirmed GoF willingness in principle to make parallel demarches urging isolation of Syria at UNGA, but noted that he needed higher-level guidance to determine how the GoF would carry out its approach. Poloff urged the GoF to focus demarches on Arab and European governments; it would be important particularly for Arab League capitals to hear a reinforcing message from Paris on the need to maintain diplomatic isolation of Damascus.

2. (S) Bouallegue noted that the GoF regularly urged European governments not to meet with senior SARG officials, and added that the Norwegian PM had apparently rejected a Syrian request to meet with Asad in New York. Grenet, who just completed a four-year tour in Damascus, added that Greece, Italy, and Spain were generally the most forward-leaning EU governments towards Damascus, though she doubted that any EU member would receive the Syrians in New York. The problem was more with the Arab League members, for whom it could be difficult to turn down Syrian requests for meetings. Moscow and Ankara would also be less receptive to approaches on isolating the SARG, given the Russians' unhelpful stance in UNSC consultations on the Mehlis commission interim report, as well as the Turkish president's insistence on traveling to Damascus earlier this year.

3. (S) Grenet added that while the GoF had approached Arab governments at the highest levels on Syria, it had done so solely from the angle of Lebanon. Any GoF demarches on isolating Syria at UNGA therefore would likely be Lebanon-focused, but could perhaps also address Syria's deteriorating human rights record, which was a shared EU concern. Poloff stressed that the totality of SARG destabilizing actions, including on Iraq and Palestinian terrorist groups, should be of concern to the GoF. She added that the July 2005 EU General Affairs Council (GAC) conclusions on Syria, while Lebanon-focused, had called into question Syria's stance on Iraq and its support for Palestinian terrorist groups. Bouallegue took the point, while observing that the GAC language on Iraq and Palestinian rejectionist groups was much softer and more positive than that contained in our demarche.

4. (S) Bouallegue concluded the discussion by offering to keep us apprised on GOF decisionmaking regarding parallel demarches in coming days.

STAPLETON